

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A drying method for drying a coating layer which is formed by coating a moving web with a coating solution containing organic solvent, comprising steps of:

transporting said web upwardly with an inclination to a horizontal direction immediately after the coating;

inclining with one or larger number of guide rollers the upward transporting of said web from said inclination toward a horizontal direction; and

drying said coating layer with a drying device having a casing in which said web enters at said inclination,

wherein said inclination is defined by the guide rollers having transport angle θ_1 at an entrance of the drying device, θ_2 in ~~[[a]]~~ the casing of the drying device and θ_3 at an exit of the drying device, and

$60^\circ \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 90^\circ$, $\theta_3 < \theta_1$, wherein θ_1 , θ_2 and θ_3 are angles with respect to the horizontal direction,

and wherein side plates are disposed on two sides of the drying device so as to prevent the solvent vapor from the coating layer from flowing out of the drying device.

2. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said one or larger number of guide rollers are disposed within said drying device.

3. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said coating ~~surface~~ layer is positioned on an upper surface of said web.

4. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a velocity of ~~said~~ a wind inside said drying device is less than 0.1 m/s when the transport of said web is stopped.

5. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said coating layer is further dried by a heat-drying means disposed downstream from said drying device.

6. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein an interval between a coating position and a first guide roller of said guide rollers disposed closest to said coating position, and being within said drying device, is less than 2m from said coating position.

7. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 6, wherein other guide rollers disposed downstream from said first guide roller are disposed with at most a 2m interval.

8. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein an entrance of said drying device is disposed within 0.7m from a coating position.

9. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one device for condensing and recovering said organic solvent in said coating solution on said coating ~~surface~~ layer is at a transporting position of said web within said drying device.

10. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 9, wherein a plate member is used for said device for condensing and recovering.

11. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 9, wherein each said device for condensing and recovering is disposed in a space formed by partitioning an inside of said drying device with said guide rollers.

12. (previously presented) A drying method claimed in claim 10, wherein said plate member is provided for a cooling apparatus, and a temperature of said plate-shaped member is adjustable with employment of said cooling apparatus.

13. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 10, wherein a flow path in which said condensed organic solvent flows is provided on a surface of said plate member.

14. (currently amended) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein ~~side plates are disposed on two sides of said drying device, or~~ said two sides of the drying device are tightly closed ~~so as to prevent said solvent vapor from said coating layer from flowing out of said drying device.~~

15. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a content of said organic solvent in said coating solution is at least 50% by mass.

16. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein said drying device dries at least 70% by mass of said organic solvent contained in said coating solution.

17. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a heating device is positioned beside a non-coating surface at a transport position of said web within said drying device.

18. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein a thickness of said coating layer is at most 50 μm prior to drying.

19. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein an extrusion die coater is used to apply said coating solution on said web supported by a back-up roller.

20. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein at least a wire bar coater or a gravure coater is used to apply said coating solution on said web.

21-41. (canceled)

42. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein $75^{\circ} \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 89^{\circ}$.

43. (previously presented) The drying method claimed in claim 1, wherein $75^{\circ} \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 88^{\circ}$.

44-46. (canceled)

47. (new) A drying method for drying a coating layer which is formed by coating a moving web with a coating solution containing organic solvent, comprising steps of:

transporting said web upwardly with an inclination to a horizontal direction immediately after the coating;

inclining with one or larger number of guide rollers the upward transporting of said web from said inclination toward a horizontal direction; and

drying said coating layer with a drying device having a casing in which said web enters at said inclination,

wherein said inclination is defined by the guide rollers having transport angle θ_1 at an entrance of the drying device, θ_2 in the casing of the drying device and θ_3 at an exit of the drying device,

$75^\circ \leq \theta_3 \leq \theta_2 \leq \theta_1 \leq 88^\circ$, $\theta_3 < \theta_1$, where θ_1 , θ_2 and θ_3 are angles with respect to the horizontal direction,

a velocity of a wind inside said drying device is less than 0.1 m/s when the transport of said web is stopped, and

an interval between a coating position and a first guide roller of said guide rollers disposed closest to said coating position, and being within said drying device, is less than 2m from said coating position.